

Unveiling The Reality of a Mother's Journey in Embracing Autism

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of seven (7) mothers raising children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Davao City, Philippines. The research aims to provide a localized understanding of the challenges, triumphs, and coping mechanisms unique to this region. Phenomenology guided the research design. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview approach to gather a detailed exploration of each other's journey. Thematic analysis revealed core statements reflecting the experiences of mothers, including the importance of accepting reality, the difficulty in raising a child with ASD, and the significance of seeking necessary support. Their coping mechanism for the challenges encountered included developing patience and persistence, acceptance and acquiring education, and seeking help through support systems. Insights from the participants revolved around the essence of unconditional love and acceptance, continuous learning and improvement, and seeking guidance and support. These findings highlight the need for tailored support services and increased awareness to assist mothers in their caregiving journey. Understanding the unique perspectives of these mothers can inform interventions and policies to better support families of children with ASD. It was further recommended to conduct a study on long-term outcomes, cultural influences, and the effectiveness of interventions to provide evidence-based guidance for supporting individuals with autism and their families. Through this, the well-being and support systems for families navigating the challenges of raising children with autism will be reinforced.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Lived experiences of Mothers, Phenomenology

1. Introduction

Raising a child with autism presents a complex and profound experience, particularly for mothers deeply involved in this challenging journey. Parenting itself is demanding, but it becomes doubly difficult for those with children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Moses et al., 2023). The necessity of tailored support services from research remains in demand as it will address the unique challenges faced by mothers, contribute to a deeper understanding of children with ASD, and how families can provide relevant support (Asmare et al., 2023).

In Nigeria, families with children diagnosed with ASD encounter rejection, discrimination, stigma, and victimization. Late diagnosis is expected due to poor knowledge, negative cultural beliefs, and a lack of qualified professionals and treatment centers. The plight of these families emphasizes the importance of raising awareness,

promoting acceptance and providing support to create a more inclusive society for individuals with ASD (Zorcec & Pop-Jordanova, 2020).

Similar challenges are evident in the Philippines, where families face difficulties in accessing services and treatments for children with ASD. Mothers, in particular, experience considerable stress and emotional strain due to their primary caregiving role (Catubigan, 2023). Limited awareness and education about ASD, coupled with a shortage of resources and services, contribute to feelings of isolation and overwhelm for families. Furthermore, the lack of research into effective interventions adds complexity to the journey of mothers raising children with autism in the Philippines (Roxas et al., 2022)

Despite the prevalence of challenges faced by families with children on the autism spectrum in the Philippines, limited research has been conducted in specific regions, such as Davao City. This research gap underscores the need to explore mothers' experiences in Davao City, providing a localized understanding of the challenges, triumphs, and coping mechanisms unique to this area.

Existing studies in the Philippines have touched upon various aspects of parents with autistic children, exploring parental involvement, understanding, challenges faced by underprivileged parents, and the economic burden of caring for children with autism (Ng'eno & Sanga, 2022; Quilendrino et al., 2022). However, a comprehensive study focusing on mothers' experiences in Davao City is lacking. This research aims to fill this gap by delving into the intricacies of the mother's journey, contributing valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge.

Understanding the experiences of mothers raising children with ASD is not only academically valuable but also socially relevant and urgent. The lack of comprehensive understanding and support in society, coupled with limited awareness and education about autism, contributes to misconceptions and stigma. By addressing these deficiencies through localized research, this study seeks to foster a more inclusive and empathetic environment, providing the necessary groundwork for tailored support services for mothers and their children with ASD in Davao City, Philippines.

1.1 Purpose of The Study

This study sought to explore and document the experiences of mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Davao City, Philippines. By delving into the unique challenges, triumphs, and emotional complexities these mothers face, the research aims to provide a localized understanding of the daily realities and coping mechanisms within this specific context. Through interviews, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform the development of tailored support services, addressing the existing research gap and fostering a more inclusive environment for families with children with ASD.

1.2 Research Questions

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of mothers with children suffering from autism. In particular, this study aims to shed light on the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of parents raising child/children with autism?
2. What are the coping mechanisms employed by parents raising child/children with autism?
3. What are the valuable insights gained from their experiences that can be shared with others?

1.3 Related Literature

Challenges of Parents with Children Suffering with Autism

The challenges faced by parents of children with autism and special needs are intricate and multifaceted, encompassing stressors that impact well-being on various levels. The profound impact of caring for a child with autism is evident in the elevated stress levels experienced by parents, as evidenced by Schieve et al. (2007). This stress emanates from the distinctive demands associated with supporting a child with autism, encompassing communication difficulties, managing challenging behaviors, social isolation, and a lack of community understanding. The emotional, mental, and physical challenges that accompany the meltdowns experienced by children with autism further compound the stressors faced by parents (Yalim & Mohamed, 2023).

Effectively managing these challenges requires parents to cultivate coping strategies and resilience. Studies, such as those by Kavaliotis (2017) and Dąbrowska & Pisula (2010), underscore the pivotal role of parental resilience in confronting the unique difficulties associated with raising a child with autism. Resilient parents exhibit an enhanced capacity to meet their children's special needs without succumbing to feelings of loneliness and isolation, highlighting the adaptive nature of resilience in the face of adversity.

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the stress experienced by parents of children with special needs extends beyond autism, as indicated by research from Lai et al. (2015), Darling et al. (2011), and Shenaar-Golan (2015). The challenges encompass concerns about the future, disruptions to family life, and daily anxiety, contributing to elevated parenting-related stress and psychological distress. In addition to these overarching challenges, parents of children with special needs may grapple with issues related to perceived parenting competence, health problems, and heightened levels of parental depression (Darling et al., 2011).

In response to these challenges, parents must deploy various coping strategies, embracing both problem-focused and emotional-focused mechanisms, as Nurhidayah et al. (2022) suggested. This diversified approach is crucial, especially when children with special needs require substantial support and present challenging behaviors. Healthcare professionals play a pivotal role in providing tailored support to parents in these situations, acknowledging their unique circumstances in caring for their children (Lai et al., 2015). Moreover, interventions that target parents' well-being, such as resilience-building initiatives, are essential components in alleviating the burden associated with caring for children with special needs (Dey et al., 2019).

The experiences of parents with children with special needs are further shaped by factors like parenting self-efficacy, coping strategies, and resilience. Parental self-efficacy, as emphasized by Coleman & Karraker (2000), is integral in guiding children through developmental challenges, drawing from parents' unique experiences, knowledge, and skills. As echoed by Dey et al. (2019) and Andayani et al. (2021), resilience emerges as a critical factor in aiding parents to navigate the stress and challenges inherent in caring for children with special needs.

Coping strategies employed by Parents of children with Special Needs

Caring for children with special needs requires parents to utilize various coping strategies, including problem-focused and emotional-focused coping mechanisms (Nurhidayah et al., 2022). Healthcare professionals must provide tailored support to parents of children with special needs, especially when the children require substantial support and present challenging behaviors (Lai et al., 2015). Moreover, targeting parents' well-being through resilience is essential to help them manage the burden of caring for their children with special needs (Dey et al., 2019).

The experiences of parents with children with special needs can be influenced by factors such as parenting self-efficacy, coping strategies, and resilience. Parents' self-efficacy plays a vital role in helping children navigate developmental challenges, given parents' unique experiences, knowledge, and skills (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). Resilience is highlighted as a crucial factor in assisting parents in dealing with the stress and challenges associated with caring for children with special needs (Dey et al., 2019; Andayani et al., 2021).

Parents of children with special needs employ various coping strategies to navigate the challenges they face. Studies have shown that parents of children with autism tend to experience higher stress levels and often utilize planning as a coping mechanism more frequently compared to parents of children with other developmental disabilities (Wang et al., 2010). Additionally, parents of children with physical and intellectual disabilities have been found to employ a range of coping strategies, with active emotional coping being a prevalent style (Ganjiwale et al., 2016).

Research has also delved into the coping strategies of parents of children with learning disabilities, revealing that these parents often resort to avoidant coping strategies and perceive a lack of control over their external environment (Auriemma et al., 2021). Furthermore, parents of children with intellectual disabilities have been observed to utilize coping strategies such as religious coping, advocacy, and maintaining positive attitudes toward their children (Abu-Ras et al., 2018).

Parents of children with special needs face unique challenges that can impact their well-being. Research emphasizes the importance of social support, collaboration between teachers and parents, and the role of mindfulness and resilience in parental competence and satisfaction. Studies have shown that perceived emotional support can reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in parents of children with special needs (موسوی & دبیری, 2021). Effective collaboration between teachers, special educators, and parents significantly supports the development of children with special needs (Ariani et al., 2019). Additionally, a significant relationship exists between family resilience, life satisfaction, and the well-being of parents of children with special needs (İNAL, 2022).

Support groups for parents of children with special needs provide comfort, emotional release, and information exchange opportunities (Ujianti, 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing and addressing the stress levels of parents of children with special needs is crucial (Chinchai et al., 2023). The obstacles parents face

in assisting children with special needs during online learning highlight the need for better understanding, time management, and support systems (Fauzi et al., 2021). Parent-to-parent support has been identified as a critical component of healthcare services for families of children with special needs (Hartman et al., 1992).

Interventions like the Nurturing Program for Parents and Their Children with Special Needs have effectively promoted empowerment and well-being among families (Pocinho & Fernandes, 2018). Social support, gratitude, and religious coping mechanisms have positively impacted parental stress levels (Ati et al., 2018; Herlina et al., 2023). Moreover, the influence of factors such as parenting stress and social support on parental anxiety underscores the need for professional support and resources for parents of children with special needs (Ren et al., 2020).

Furthermore, studies have indicated that internal factors such as hope, gratitude, emotional control, resilience, and self-compassion are crucial for the subjective well-being of parents of children with special needs Andayani et al. (2021). Furthermore, the level of psychological and family resilience in parents of children with special needs differs significantly from that of parents of children with typical development (İNAL, 2022).

Effective parental coping strategies in caring for children with special needs are essential, and further research in this area is necessary to offer comprehensive support to parents (Nurhidayah et al., 2022). Understanding the relationships between cognitive-behavioral avoidance, dysfunctional attitudes, and levels of hopelessness in parents of children with special needs can provide insights into effective support mechanisms (ATILGAN & Iskender, 2022). Previous research has underscored the significance of social support, particularly parent-to-parent support, in assisting families in navigating the challenges associated with raising children with special needs (Kerr & McIntosh, 2000; Hartman et al., 1992).

Moreover, the availability of information and parents' attitudes toward children with special needs can significantly impact the well-being of both parents and children ("The Relationship Understanding and Attitudes of Parents for Learning's Achievement Children with Special Needs in Inclusive School," 2017; "Analysis on the Dilemma and Breakthrough Path of Home-School Cooperation in Peizhi School," 2022). Studies have also demonstrated that adequate access to online resources is crucial for parents of children with special needs to effectively care for their children and maintain their mental well-being (Wong et al., 2015). Additionally, cognitive programs have proven effective in reducing parental stress and behavior problems in children with special needs (Tiba & Morar, 2021).

Related Studies on Parents of Children with Autism

Studies have shown that parental involvement significantly impacts the communication skills of children with autism (Tenerife et al., 2023). In Asian countries, including the Philippines, research has highlighted the challenges faced by fathers in managing children with autism (Suhaimi et al., 2020). Families and children with autism in the Philippines have underscored the importance of involving all family members in adapting to new routines (Saliverou et al., 2021).

A meta-synthesis on Asian primary caregivers of children with autism emphasized the need to provide an inclusive overview of their experiences and needs (Shorey et al., 2019). Studies in Southeast Asia have identified factors associated with parenting stress in parents of children with autism, such as social support and financial difficulties (Ilias et al., 2018). Additionally, research has shown that parental migration can influence the risk of

autism in children, with first-generation immigrant parents having a higher incidence of autism spectrum disorders (Allport et al., 2022).

Studies have also explored the experiences of parents of children with autism in various Asian countries, including China (Hobart, 2008). Cultural adaptation of interventions, such as parent psychoeducational programs, has been highlighted as essential for supporting Chinese immigrant families of children with autism (Xu et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on coping styles and support systems among Southeast Asian parents raising children with autism has provided insights into their experiences (Luong et al., 2009).

1.4 Theoretical Lens

This study was anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory. This theory explains how individuals perceive and respond to stress, particularly parents of children with special needs. This theoretical framework highlights that external events do not solely determine stress but is a dynamic process shaped by cognitive appraisal and coping strategies. In the context of mothers with autistic children, the theory becomes particularly relevant. The unique stressors faced by these mothers, such as challenges in communication, managing behaviors, and societal understanding, align with the central tenets of the Stress and Coping Theory. By comprehending how these mothers appraise the demands of caring for a child with autism and the coping mechanisms they employ, interventions can be tailored to enhance their overall well-being.

This is also supported by Masten's (2001) Resilience Theory. This theory focuses on individuals' ability to rebound from adversity and is highly pertinent to parents of children with special needs, including those with autism. This theory underscores the remarkable resilience often demonstrated by parents facing the challenges of raising children with special needs. By exploring personal characteristics, social support networks, and adaptive coping strategies, such as those employed by mothers of autistic children, the Resilience Theory contributes to identifying and reinforcing factors that empower parents to effectively navigate the complexities of caring for their children. In the context of mothers with autistic children, these theories collectively offer a framework for understanding stressors, coping mechanisms, and resilience factors, providing valuable insights for supporting parents in their caregiving journey.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study followed a qualitative approach with phenomenology as the guiding framework. Phenomenology is used to explore the lived experiences of people on a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2019). Through in-depth interviews with seven mothers, this method aims to uncover the intricate details and subjective meanings surrounding the challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights associated with parenting a child with autism. The qualitative nature of the interviews allows for a deep understanding of each participant's unique perspectives (Moustakas (2020).

2.2 Research Participants

This study involved seven mothers residing in Davao City, selected based on specific inclusion criteria. Firstly, participants must be the biological mothers of children with autism. Second, they should be 18 years of age or older. Third, their child should be three years old or above. Lastly, participants must have been residents of Davao City for at least one year. These criteria aim to ensure a diverse yet specific participant group, allowing for a focused exploration of the experiences and challenges faced by mothers raising children with special needs in the local context of Davao City.

2.3 Data Analysis

This study commenced by employing a rigorous participant recruitment process while adhering to predetermined criteria. Seven qualified participants were selected and ensured that their narratives aligned closely with the specific context and challenges related to raising children with autism. The chosen data collection technique is the semi-structured interview, providing a platform for an in-depth exploration of the mothers' perspectives. Open-ended questions will be employed, allowing participants to share their experiences freely. The interviews will be conducted in English and Bisaya, ensuring participants' comfort and accurate expression. Interviews lasted from 30-45 minutes. Data will be systematically recorded throughout the interviews through audio recording, upon participant's approval, and detailed notetaking. This meticulous approach to data collection aims to extract rich, contextually relevant information, providing a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by mothers of children with autism.

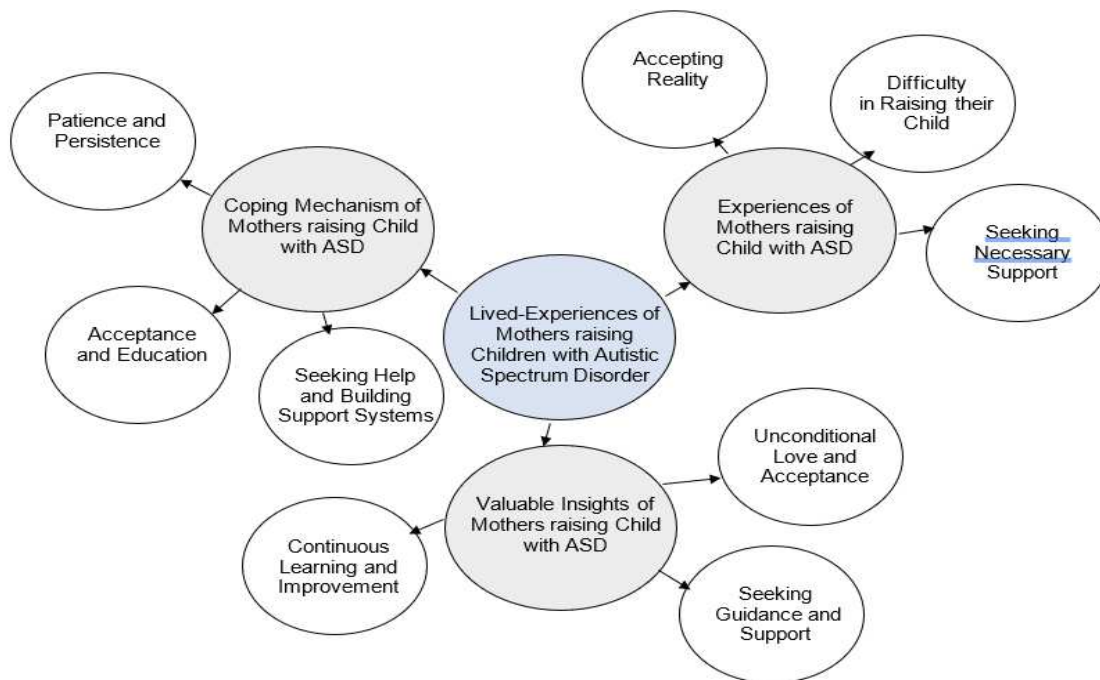
In exploring the challenges faced by mothers of children with autism, this study employs Clark and Braune's (2019) data analysis steps. Beginning with data familiarization, the process entails generating initial codes, organizing them into themes, reviewing and refining these themes iteratively, and ultimately defining and naming the identified themes. This systematic approach ensures a thorough examination of the mothers' experiences, capturing nuances in their narratives about raising children with autism. By adhering to this robust methodology, the study aims to offer valuable insights into the coping strategies and resilience demonstrated by mothers facing the unique demands of caring for children with autism.

2.4 Ethical Consideration

In researching mothers with autistic children, ethical considerations play a paramount role, aligning with the Belmont (1979) principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. In order to uphold respect for persons, informed consent will be sought from each participating mother, ensuring they understand the study's purpose, potential risks, and benefits. The principle of beneficence underscores the commitment to maximizing benefits while minimizing potential harm, emphasizing the study's positive impact on understanding the challenges mothers face raising children with autism. Justice will be ensured by avoiding exploitation, maintaining confidentiality, and promoting fair participant selection. This study adheres to ethical standards, prioritizing the well-being and rights of the participating mothers.

3. Results

Thematic Analysis



Experiences of Mothers of Children with Autism

Table 1. Themes and Core Statement on The Experiences of Mothers with Children with Autism

Themes	Core Statements
Accepting Reality	P2: "Acceptance is the key, jud." P3: "Since you love them, you must accept them." P6: "Acceptance is the key."
Difficulty in Raising their Child	P5: "Dealing sa ilang behaviour and emotions maabot jud jud sa point na maka bati og kakapoy sa pag atiman og mahutdan kag pasensya." P6: "Raising a child with autism is a challenging part of being a mother." P7: "Dili dali ang mag atiman ug magpadako sama sa akung mga anak nga naay autism."
Seeking Necessary Support	P3: "Naga seek kog help sa mga tao nan aka sabot sakung sitwasyon ug sa akung anak." P6: "Nag seek pud kog help sa government para sa therapy ug medicine niya." P7: "Naga voice out ko sakung mga kaila kung unsay mg ana ecounter nako na problem sa akung anak or naga share pud ko about sa mga happy moments kauban akung anak na naay autism."

Accepting Reality. Acceptance involves acknowledging and embracing the unique qualities and challenges that come with raising a child with ASD. It goes beyond mere acknowledgment to a deep understanding and appreciation of the child's individuality. By accepting their child's condition, parents can create a nurturing environment that fosters growth, development, and overall well-being. P2's statement, *"acceptance is the key jud,"* implies that acceptance serves as a foundation for building resilience, patience, and a positive outlook in the face of challenges. P3's perspective, *"Since you love them, you must accept them,"* highlights the interconnectedness of love and acceptance. Love serves as the driving force behind a parent's unwavering commitment to accepting their child with all their strengths and vulnerabilities. It reinforces the idea that acceptance stems from a place of deep love and compassion. P6's assertion, *"Acceptance is the key,"* encapsulates the overarching theme of acceptance as a fundamental element in the parenting journey of children with ASD. It suggests that acceptance is not just a one-time decision but an ongoing process that positively shapes the parent-child relationship and influences the child's growth and development. By embracing acceptance as a guiding principle, parents can create a supportive and nurturing environment that allows their children to thrive and reach their full potential despite their obstacles.

Difficulty in Raising their Child. Raising children with behavioral disorders, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), presents unique challenges that can be emotionally and physically demanding for parents. P5's observation, *"Dealing sa ilang behavior and emotions maabot jud jud sa point na maka bati og kakapoy sa pag atiman og mahutdan kag pasensya,"* underscores the taxing nature of managing the behaviors and emotions of children with behavioral disorders. Parents often find themselves exhausted and drained as they navigate the unpredictable and sometimes intense reactions of their children, requiring immense patience and understanding. P6's acknowledgment, *"Raising a child with autism is a challenging part of being a mother,"* highlights the inherent difficulties that come with caring for a child with ASD. The daily routines, financial burdens, and emotional toll of supporting a child with special needs can be overwhelming, impacting not only the child but also the entire family dynamic. Moreover, P7's statement, *"Dili dali ang mag atiman ug magpadako sama sa akung mga anak nga naay autism ma'am,"* further emphasizes the significant challenges that parents face in raising children with autism. The complexities of meeting the unique needs of children with ASD, coupled with societal misconceptions and judgments, can add layers of stress and pressure to the parenting experience. Parents must navigate a complex landscape of emotional, financial, and social challenges while providing the necessary care and support for their children. The journey of parenting a child with ASD requires resilience, patience, and a strong support system to overcome the obstacles and promote the well-being and development of the child.

Seeking Necessary Support. Seeking help, utilizing available resources, and engaging with support networks allows parents navigate the challenges of parenting a child with special needs. P3's statement, *"Naga seek kog help sa mga tao nan aka sabot sakung sitwasyon ug sa akung anak,"* underscores the significance of reaching out to others who understand their situation and can provide valuable support and guidance. Seeking help from individuals who can empathize with their experiences can offer emotional relief, practical advice, and a sense of community. P6's experience, *"Nag seek pud kog help sa government para sa therapy ug medicine niya,"* emphasizes the importance of accessing external resources and professional assistance to address the specific needs of a child with ASD. Government programs, therapy services, and medical support can play a crucial role in enhancing the child's

development and well-being, while also providing parents with the necessary tools and knowledge to support their child effectively. P7's approach, *"Naga voice out ko sakung mga kaila kung unsay mg ana ecounter nako na problem sa akung anak or naga share pud ko about sa mga happy moments kauban akung anak na naay autism,"* highlights the value of open communication and sharing experiences with friends and family. By vocalizing their challenges and celebrating their successes, parents can build a strong support network that offers encouragement, understanding, and solidarity during both difficult and joyful moments. By seeking help from knowledgeable individuals, accessing available resources, and engaging with supportive communities, parents can enhance their resilience, acquire valuable insights, and foster a sense of belonging and understanding.

Coping Mechanism of Mothers of Children with Autism

Table 2. Themes and Core Statement on Coping Mechanisms of Mothers with Children having Autism

Themes	Core Statements
Patience and Persistence	P4: "Always stay positive. We should have to accept and be patient. Be persistent but resilient." P5: "Accepting and celebrating the uniqueness of my child, as well as embracing the joy and progress to a more positive outlook." P6: "You need to be patient to the highest level. You need to be firm in imposing discipline."
Acceptance and Education	P1: "Treat your child with autism as a normal child." P5: "I attended seminars in school and orientation to educate myself about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to better understand the needs of my child." P6: "Acceptance is the key. Every day is a chance to adjust and learn aron walay gubot."
Seeking Help and Building Support Systems	P4: "Ready pod ka modawat sa mga advices and suggestion gikan sa ubang mga parent nga same sa imong experience." P6: "You need to be patient to the highest level. You need to be firm in imposing discipline." P7: "Naga seek kog help sa mga tao nan aka sabot sakung sitwasyon ug sa akung anak."

Patience and Persistence. It is important to maintain a positive attitude, accepting the uniqueness of the child, and demonstrating unwavering patience and resilience in the face of challenges. P4's advice, *"Always stay positive. We should have to accept and be patient. Be persistent but resilient,"* highlights the significance of maintaining a hopeful and optimistic mindset while navigating the complexities of parenting a child with special needs. Cultivating patience, persistence, and resilience enables parents to face obstacles with determination and adaptability, fostering a supportive environment for their child's growth and development. P5's perspective, *"Accepting and celebrating the uniqueness of my child, as well as embracing the joy and progress to a more positive outlook,"* underscores the importance of acknowledging and appreciating the individuality of children with behavioral disorders. By embracing

their child's strengths, milestones, and progress, parents can cultivate a sense of pride, positivity, and optimism that fuels their journey of caregiving and advocacy. P6's insight, *"You need to be patient to the highest level. You need to be firm in imposing discipline,"* emphasizes the critical balance between patience and discipline in raising a child with ASD. While patience is essential for understanding and supporting the child's needs, maintaining consistency and setting boundaries through firm discipline can help establish structure, routine, and guidance for the child's behavior and development. By fostering a positive mindset, accepting and celebrating the child's uniqueness, and demonstrating unwavering patience and discipline, parents can create a nurturing and empowering environment that promotes the well-being and growth of their child.

Acceptance and Education. Treating the child with acceptance, seeking knowledge through education, and embracing a mindset of understanding and adjustment are fundamental aspects of parenting children with behavioral disorders, particularly autism spectrum disorder (ASD). P1's advice, *"Treat your child with autism as a normal child,"* emphasizes the significance of viewing and treating children with ASD with the same love, respect, and expectations as any other child. By recognizing the child's inherent worth and potential, parents can create an inclusive and supportive environment that fosters the child's self-esteem, independence, and overall well-being. P5's experience, *"I attended seminars in school and orientation to educate myself about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to better understand the needs of my child,"* highlights the value of continuous learning and self-education in effectively supporting a child with ASD. By actively seeking information, resources, and professional guidance, parents can enhance their understanding of the unique challenges and strengths associated with ASD, enabling them to provide tailored care and support for their child. P6's insight, *"Acceptance is the key. Every day is a chance to adjust and learn aron walay gubot,"* underscores the importance of acceptance and adaptability in the parenting journey of children with behavioral disorders. Embracing the child's diagnosis, unique traits, and evolving needs allows parents to navigate challenges with resilience, openness, and a willingness to learn and grow alongside their child. The combination of acceptance and education forms a powerful foundation for parents raising children with behavioral disorders like ASD. By embracing acceptance, seeking knowledge through education, and fostering a culture of understanding and adaptability, parents can empower themselves to provide the best possible care, support, and advocacy for their child with ASD, ultimately promoting their growth, happiness, and success.

Seeking Help and Building Support Systems. Being open to advice and suggestions from fellow parents, maintaining patience and discipline, and actively seeking assistance from others who understand the situation are helpful in coping with the challenges as parents of children with ASD. P4's advice, *"Ready pod ka modawat sa mga advices and suggestion gikan sa ubang mga parent nga same sa imong experience,"* highlights the value of seeking guidance and insights from parents who share similar experiences. By connecting with others who understand the unique challenges of raising a child with ASD, parents can gain valuable perspectives, practical tips, and emotional support that can help them navigate their parenting journey more effectively. Likewise, P6's perspective, *"You need to be patient to the highest level. You need to be firm in imposing discipline,"* underscores the importance of balancing patience with firmness while raising a child with behavioral disorders. Parents can establish boundaries, routines, and expectations that support their child's development and well-being by cultivating a patient and consistent approach to discipline. Furthermore, P7's insight, *"Naga seek kog help sa mga tao nan aka sabot saking sitwasyon"* ^{www.ijrp.org}

ug sa akung anak," emphasizes the proactive step of seeking help from individuals who understand the parent's situation and the needs of their child. By reaching out to professionals, support groups, or trusted individuals for guidance, advice, and assistance, parents can access resources, expertise, and emotional support that can enhance their ability to care for their child with ASD. Seeking help and building support systems plays a vital role in the parenting journey of children with behavioral disorders like ASD, as parents can cultivate a strong support network that enhances their ability to advocate for their child, promote their well-being, and foster a nurturing and inclusive environment for their growth and development.

Valuable Insights of Mothers with Children Having Autism

Table 3. Themes and Core Statement on Valuable Insights of Mothers with Children with Autism

Themes	Core Statements
Unconditional Love and Acceptance	P4: "Love and accept your child unconditionally." P5: "We need to show our love. As parents, we need to expand our knowledge about how to raise a child with ASD." P6: "Love your child unconditionally."
Continuous Learning and Improvement	P1: "To truly assist your child, you must acknowledge that they are unique and that you are the one who must help them get over this obstacle." P4: "Building a strong support system, Seeking professional guidance." P6: "Take the opportunity to improve yourself as a mother to be a responsible mother."
Seeking Guidance and Support	P4: "Undergo counseling; seek advice from the experts/doctors." P5: "Seeking guidance from professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, and behavioral therapists." P7: "Imoha lang una dawaton ang reality ug mag seek ug help sa mga expert na tao nga naa sad experience na same ug situation."

Unconditional Love and Acceptance Parents should demonstrate unwavering love, expand knowledge to support the child effectively, and embrace acceptance in nurturing a child with ASD. P4's statement, "*Love and accept your child unconditionally,*" emphasizes the significance of providing a nurturing and supportive environment where the child feels valued, understood, and accepted for who they are. Unconditional love fosters a sense of security, belonging, and self-worth in the child, creating a foundation for their emotional well-being and development. P5's insight, "*We need to show our love. As parents, we need to expand our knowledge about how to raise a child with ASD,*" highlights the dual importance of expressing love and actively seeking knowledge to better understand and meet the needs of a child with ASD. By combining love with continuous learning and education, parents can enhance their ability to provide tailored care, support, and advocacy for their children, promoting their growth and overall quality of life. P6's perspective, "*Love your child unconditionally,*" reinforces the idea that unconditional love is powerful in nurturing a child with ASD. By demonstrating consistent love, empathy, and acceptance, parents can create a safe and nurturing environment where the child feels valued, respected, and supported, fostering their

emotional resilience and self-confidence. By demonstrating unwavering love, expanding knowledge to support the child effectively, and embracing acceptance of the child's unique traits and needs, parents can create a nurturing and inclusive environment that promotes the child's emotional well-being, development, and overall quality of life.

Continuous Learning and Improvement. It is important that parents recognize the uniqueness of the child, seeking guidance from professionals, and committing to personal growth and development as a parent to provide the best possible care for the child. P1's statement, "To truly assist your child, you must acknowledge that they are unique and that you are the one who must help them get over this obstacle," highlights the significance of understanding and embracing the individuality of the child with ASD. By recognizing the child's unique strengths, challenges, and needs, parents can tailor their approach to caregiving, education, and support, fostering the child's growth and development in a personalized and effective manner. P4's insight, *"Building a strong support system, Seeking guidance from professionals,"* underscores the value of creating a network of support that includes professionals, experts, and other parents who can offer valuable insights, advice, and resources. By collaborating with professionals and building a strong support system, parents can access specialized knowledge, expertise, and services that can enhance their ability to address the child's needs and navigate the complexities of raising a child with ASD. P6's perspective, *"Take the opportunity to improve yourself as a mother to be a responsible mother,"* emphasizes the importance of personal growth, self-reflection, and continuous improvement in the parenting journey. By committing to ongoing learning, self-care, and self-improvement, parents can enhance their parenting skills, emotional resilience, and capacity to provide the best possible care and support for their child with ASD. By recognizing the child's uniqueness, seeking guidance from professionals, and prioritizing personal growth and development as a parent, individuals can create a supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the well-being, development, and success of the child with ASD.

Seeking Guidance and Support. Collaboration with professionals and experts plays a vital role in the effective parenting of children with behavioral disorders. P4's statement, *"Undergo counseling, Seek advice from the experts/doctors,"* highlights the value of seeking professional counseling and guidance to address the emotional, psychological, and practical aspects of parenting a child with ASD. Counseling can provide parents with valuable support, coping strategies, and tools to manage stress, enhance communication, and promote positive parent-child relationships. Additionally, seeking advice from experts and doctors can help parents access specialized knowledge, resources, and interventions tailored to meet the specific needs of their child with ASD. P5's insight, *"Seeking guidance from professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, and behavioral therapists,"* underscores the importance of collaborating with a multidisciplinary team of professionals to address the diverse needs of a child with ASD. Speech therapists can support language development and communication skills, occupational therapists can assist with sensory integration and daily living skills, and behavioral therapists can provide strategies for managing challenging behaviors and promoting positive behavior change. By seeking guidance from these professionals, parents can access comprehensive support and interventions to enhance their child's development and well-being. P7's perspective, *"Imoha lang una dawaton ang reality ug mag seek ug help sa mga expert na tao nga naa sad experience na same ug situation,"* emphasizes the significance of accepting the reality of the child's condition and reaching out to experts and professionals who have experience and expertise in supporting children with ASD. By seeking help from individuals who understand the challenges and complexities of raising a

child with ASD, parents can gain valuable insights, practical advice, and emotional support to navigate the journey of parenting a child with special needs effectively.

It is evident that seeking guidance and support from professionals is essential for parents raising children with behavioral disorders like ASD. By engaging with counselors, therapists, doctors, and experts in the field, parents can access specialized knowledge, resources, and interventions to support their child's development, address challenges, and promote a positive and nurturing environment for their child with ASD.

Discussions

Experiences of Mothers Raising Children with ASD

Accepting Reality. Acceptance involves acknowledging and embracing the unique qualities and challenges of raising a child with ASD, leading to a deep understanding and appreciation of the child's individuality. By accepting their child's condition, parents can create a nurturing environment conducive to growth, development, and overall well-being, thus fostering a positive parent-child relationship. This ongoing process of acceptance shapes the parent-child dynamic, influencing the child's growth positively and enabling them to thrive and reach their full potential despite the obstacles they may encounter. Petcharat and Liehr (2017) suggest mindfulness training as an intervention to promote the well-being and stress management of parents of children with special needs, aligning with the idea of acceptance and embracing the challenges. Similarly, Chua and Shorey (2021) advocate for mindfulness-based and acceptance commitment therapy-based approaches to enhance the mental well-being of parents of children with developmental disabilities, supporting the notion that acceptance is crucial for parental adjustment and well-being in the context of raising a child with ASD.

Difficulty in Raising their Child. Raising children with ASD poses emotional and physical challenges for parents, compounded by societal misconceptions and judgments, which can heighten stress levels. Parents must navigate a multifaceted landscape of emotional, financial, and social challenges while ensuring the provision of adequate care and support for their children with ASD. To promote the well-being and development of their child, parents must demonstrate resilience and patience and cultivate a robust support system to overcome obstacles encountered on this parenting journey. Brehaut et al. (2004) indicate that parents of children with disabilities are more prone to physical and psychological health problems, which aligns with the challenges highlighted in the text. Additionally, Dababnah et al. (2018) suggest that parents of children with ASD experience elevated stress levels, depressive symptoms, and lower overall well-being compared to parents of typically developing children, emphasizing the significant impact of these challenges on parental well-being. Similarly, Chalwe et al. (2021) highlight the social isolation, emotional stress, depression, grief, and financial difficulties faced by parents of children with ASD, reinforcing the complex landscape of challenges that parents must navigate while ensuring adequate care and support for their children.

Seeking Necessary Support. Parents of children with special needs can navigate challenges by seeking help, utilizing resources, and engaging with support networks. Vocalizing challenges and celebrating successes helps build a strong support network that offers encouragement, understanding, and solidarity. Through seeking help from knowledgeable individuals, accessing resources, and engaging with supportive communities, parents enhance resilience, gain valuable insights, and foster a sense of belonging and understanding. Masi et al. (2021) emphasize the significance of external factors in affecting parental well-being, aligning with the notion that seeking support is crucial for families of children with disabilities. Additionally, Sullivan and Stadtlander (2020) highlight the challenges parents face in understanding their child's needs, which can lead to meltdowns, emphasizing the importance of accessing resources and seeking assistance from knowledgeable individuals to navigate these challenges effectively.

Coping Mechanism of Mothers Raising Child with ASD

Patience and Persistence. Maintaining a positive attitude, accepting the child's uniqueness, and demonstrating patience and resilience are crucial in parenting. Patience aids in understanding and supporting the child's needs, while consistency and firm discipline establish structure and guidance. Fostering a positive mindset, accepting the child's uniqueness, and demonstrating patience and discipline create a nurturing environment conducive to the child's well-being and growth. Renzo et al. (2021) highlight the challenges parents face regarding communication, emotion regulation, and behaviors in children with ASD, emphasizing the significance of patience and understanding in navigating these difficulties. Moreover, Costa et al. (2019) stress the importance of parents modeling appropriate responses during challenging moments, aligning with fostering a positive mindset and demonstrating patience and discipline to create a nurturing environment conducive to the child's well-being and growth.

Acceptance and Education. Treating the child with acceptance, seeking education, and embracing an understanding mindset is vital in parenting children with behavioral disorders, especially ASD. Acceptance of the child's diagnosis and unique traits, coupled with ongoing education, allows parents to navigate challenges with resilience and openness. By embracing acceptance, seeking knowledge, and fostering adaptability, parents empower themselves to provide optimal care, support, and advocacy for their child with ASD, promoting their growth, happiness, and success. Reid et al. (2020), highlight the importance of understanding various aspects of ASD early on, as this knowledge can empower caregivers to better understand their child's unique needs and behaviors. Similarly, Chin et al. (2023) emphasizes that understanding coping strategies used by parents of children with ASD can enhance parental well-being and improve the quality of care provided, reinforcing the significance of continuous learning and education for improving the care provided to children with ASD.

They are seeking Help and Building Support Systems. Being open to advice, maintaining patience and discipline, and seeking assistance from understanding individuals aid in coping with the challenges of parenting children with ASD. Parents can access resources, expertise, and emotional support by reaching out to professionals, support groups, or trusted individuals, enhancing their caregiving abilities. Seeking help and building support systems are crucial in the parenting journey of children with ASD, enabling parents to advocate for their children, promote their well-being, and foster a nurturing environment for their growth and development. The significance of seeking help through

support programs is highlighted by Lai et al. (2015), who address the importance of addressing the well-being and coping needs of parents of children with ASD. Their research emphasizes the value of support programs in providing assistance and resources for parents facing the challenges of raising a child with ASD. Additionally, Wang et al. (2021) highlight the importance of implementing effective intervention programs targeted at parents of children with ASD, indicating the crucial role that support programs play in providing parents with the necessary guidance, education, and emotional support to navigate the complexities of parenting a child with ASD effectively.

Valuable Insights of Mothers Raising Child with ASD

Unconditional Love and Acceptance. Parents should prioritize demonstrating unwavering love, expanding their knowledge, and embracing acceptance in nurturing a child with ASD. Consistent love, empathy, and acceptance create a safe environment where the child feels valued, respected, and supported, enhancing their emotional resilience and self-confidence. Through unwavering love, expanding knowledge, and embracing acceptance, parents foster a nurturing and inclusive environment that promotes the child's emotional well-being, development, and overall quality of life. This notion resonates with the importance highlighted by Costa et al. (2019) of parents modeling appropriate responses, suggesting that unconditional love is a foundation for positive parental behaviors and emotional support. Similarly, Hu et al. (2019) focus on parental emotion regulation and behaviors within families of children with ASD, suggesting that unconditional love fosters a nurturing environment that promotes the child's emotional well-being and overall quality of life.

Continuous Learning and Improvement. Parents must recognize their child's uniqueness, seek professional guidance, and commit to personal growth and development to provide optimal care. Through ongoing learning, self-care, and self-improvement, parents enhance their parenting skills, emotional resilience, and capacity to support their child with ASD effectively. By prioritizing personal growth, seeking professional guidance, and acknowledging the child's uniqueness, parents cultivate a supportive environment conducive to the well-being, development, and success of their child with ASD. Lai et al. (2015) stresses the significance of addressing the well-being and coping needs of parents of children with ASD, suggesting that seeking knowledge and education is essential for parents to effectively navigate the challenges they face. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of recognizing parents' educational needs and tailored health education materials to support parents in understanding and addressing their child's unique needs.

They were seeking Guidance and Support. Collaboration with professionals is essential in effective parenting for children with behavioral disorders like ASD. Seeking help from individuals who understand the challenges allows parents to gain valuable insights, advice, and emotional support. Engaging with counselors, therapists, doctors, and experts enables parents to access specialized knowledge and interventions to support their child's development and promote a positive environment for their well-being. Hidayah & Lestari (2019) emphasize that collaboration with professionals can enhance parents' coping skills, reduce stress, and improve their quality of life. Additionally, Ardiyani et al. (2020) indicate that interventions involving families, including collaboration with professionals, can lead to optimal results, stressing the significance of engaging with counselors, therapists, doctors, and experts to support the development and well-being of children with ASD.

Conclusions

The study revealed that parents of children with autism faced the challenge of coping with the emotional and physical demands during their child's meltdowns, emphasizing the need for effective coping strategies and support programs.

Parents highlighted the significance of patience and persistence in navigating the challenges of raising an autistic child. Maintaining a positive attitude, accepting the child's uniqueness, and demonstrating unwavering patience were crucial. Moreover, the findings emphasized the role of continuous learning, education, and seeking necessary support to effectively address the behavioral complexities associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The study illuminated parents' proactive steps to seek support, emphasizing the value of building robust support systems. Open communication, seeking help from professionals, and engaging with supportive communities were identified as pivotal in helping parents cope with the multifaceted challenges of parenting a child with special needs. Seeking guidance from fellow parents and professionals was vital in fostering community and empowerment.

Recommendations

This research study has come up with the following recommendations as follows:

Parents of children with autism should prioritize cultivating environments of unconditional love and acceptance. Continuous learning about autism spectrum disorder (ASD), seeking guidance from professionals, and building strong support networks through community connections can significantly enhance their ability to support and nurture the well-being of their children.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in fostering inclusive environments for students with autism. Offering professional development opportunities for educators, promoting awareness of diverse learning needs, and creating sensory-friendly spaces within schools contribute to a supportive and inclusive educational experience for students with ASD.

Local Government Units (LGUs) should establish support services tailored to the unique needs of families raising children with autism. This includes accessible therapy services, counseling, and community programs. Additionally, LGUs can promote community awareness to reduce stigmas associated with autism and collaborate with advocacy groups to develop targeted initiatives.

Future researchers should explore the long-term outcomes for individuals with autism and their families, investigating factors contributing to successful transitions to adulthood and ongoing support needs. Researchers should also explore cultural and contextual influences on caregiving practices and evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions and support programs for evidence-based guidance.

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